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ABSTRACT

In this paper the author investigates the function of student evaluation in relation to the educational process. He concludes that traditional approaches are inadequate because they view evaluation as either a static measure of information comprehension or as a coercive tool. The author, instead of viewing education as static, linear communication, suggests that education is a transactional process between professor and student. Evaluation consequently would involve assessing the students ability to decode the professor's message and encode new messages, rather than simply measuring information comprehension. Instead of underestimating the student and using evaluation as a coercive or motivational tool, the author proposes that students possess self-direction and self-control and are capable of setting their own educational objectives and assessing their progress. The author describes several industrial appraisal systems which have served as a basis for developing alternative methods of student evaluation. He reports the results of his actual applications in the college classroom. (LG)

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STUDENT IMAGE, STUDENT EVALUATION AND EDUCATION.

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STUDENT IMAGE, STUDENT EVALUATION AND EDUCATION

Any education system must be concerned about the problem of student evaluation. Is student evaluation the end product of the system or only an integral portion of the entire educational process? There are those who see evaluation as the most important, or at least one of the most important, functions of the university. Other persons prefer to see student evaluation as only a portion of the entire communication process between professor and student.

In this paper I would like to investigate these approaches to student evaluation. Although a detailed discussion of each cannot be set forth in a short paper some suggestions of interest can be made. At the close of the paper I will attempt to indicate the direction in which my own teaching has progressed concerning evaluation and indicate student reactions to it.

Recently an university administrator expressed his philosophy of student evaluation in the following words:

> Traditional universities such as this one rarely shape or change society, except indirectly through the new ideas which are originated in them; most often universities reflect society's interests and demands, and it is society which insists that students who intend to be doctors, lawyers, engineers, or teachers should be certified as competent. The universities, after subjecting students to prescribed programs and classes, and to evaluation by means of term work, tests, and examinations, award degrees to some students as certificates of competence and refuse degrees to the incompetent; the latter are not, therefore, "failures":

they may be successful in other professions, or in non-professional activities (Cherry, 1972).

This understanding of student evaluation risks the danger of seperating evaluation from the learning process. Information, it is held, is transferred from the professor to the student via lectures, textbooks, class discussions, and the student is evaluated upon his comprehension of this information. When the student has absorbed the modicum of information which society deems necessary for success then he is turned loose with his "certificate of competence."

Still other professors prefer to speak of student evaluation as a tool which forces the student to study and learn. In the eyes of these professors students, to paraphrase Mc Gregor's Theory X (McGregor, 1960), inherently dislike studying, will avoid studying whenever possible, and must be coerced, controlled, directed, and threatened with punishment before they will put forth adequate effort. This student is understood to have relatively little ambition, wishes to avoid responsibility, and wants security through the lecture and grading system. Thus the evaluation system becomes the club which forces the student to learn. Without this club, it is argued, students will not attend classes, will not 'crack' a textbook, or obtain the knowledge which is necessary for them to become worthwhile members of a profession or society.

These approaches to evaluation may be criticized on several grounds: 1) they equate education with a static concept of communication; 2) they underestimate the student; 3) they equate motivation with coercion. Similarly as long as one is concerned

with the requirements of society for the university, the learning process may be sacrificed. Let us briefly examine these criticisms of the traditional approach to student evaluation.

First, students need not be seen as persons who must be coerced, controlled, directed, and threatened with punishment before they will put forth any effort in their studies. Again we may paraphrase McGregor by taking a Theory Y attitude towards students by affirming that students do not inherently dislike studying. Those who have acquired a distaste for it have dropped out of the system long before the university. Students will exercise self-direction and self-control. They can learn within the educational system to accept responsibility and even seek it. Given the opportunity students are imaginative, ingenious, and creative in solving the problems facing them within and without the system.

Secondly, let us approach education as a communication process. There is information available in the system which the student wishes to obtain. In some cases this information is possessed by the instructor but in many cases the instructor can only serve as a participant in the information retrieval process. Similarly the process of communication within the classroom is not linear from professor to student. Miller (1969) has described the implications of the concept of process for education in these words:

> Process implies that particular instances of... communication should not be thought of as discrete events with identifiable beginnings and ends, but rather as parts of a dynamic, ongoing whole which

> has no clearly defined temporal boundaries. In particular, process stresses the transactional nature of ... communication, rather than conceptualizing it as a unidirectional, linear act.

Thus student evaluation is to be seen not as the end of a learning experience but as an integral part of the whole. The passing of an examination does not mark the completion of a course but is only a portion of the entire dynamic process. An examination may be one method by which the student communicates with the professor as the lecture is only one method by which the professor communicates with the student. As such the examination involves not only the indication that information has been received by the student but also the students ability to decode the professor's messages and encode new messages which give the professor relevant information about his students.

More is involved in evaluation than the mere assessment of information possessed by the student. The decoding skills of the student are tested as he seeks to understand the meaning which the professor has for the concept on which he is being examined. Many professors confess amazement that students always get low marks on the first exam of a course and such high marks on the final examination. They interpret this as learning upon the part of the student. What many call learning is often nothing more than the fact that during the first examination the student learns how to decode the professor's meanings for the course. Once he ascertains these meanings he is then able to provide the proper answers on later examinations.

The evaluation process also involves the student's ability to encode messages which stimulate the right meanings in the

mind of the professor. Berlo (1960) reminds us that "meanings are in people." This applies to the evaluation process within a classroom. The professor writes questions based upon his meanings for the subject matter he teaches. Students use the index cues (Tannenbaum, 1955) in these questions to discover the professor's meanings and provide feedback which indicates that they have common, or shared, meanings.

If education is a process based upon communication between professor and students then one must abandon the concept of evaluation as the end-all of education. No longer can one conceive of the university as the place in which the professor encodes messages and the student decodes them. In fact this source orientation has allowed many to fall into the evaluation trap. Meanings are in people. Students have meanings and objectives for their college education. Every course a student takes is approached with certain objectives and meanings in mind. These are based upon past experience, personality characteristics, and peer group norms. If these objectives are not met the student will not learn. Education, then, may be understood as a communication system in which professors, with their meanings and objectives for the process, interact with students who also possess valid meanings and objectives for the process.

Finally, the view set forth above which holds that evaluation is necessary for motivation sublimely misunderstands the dynamics of motivation. David C. McClelland (1965) has set forth eleven propositions for motive acquisition several of which are important for an understanding of student evaluation. McClelland's propositions have grown out of his experience in

teaching achievement motivation in developing countries.

They are as follows.

1. The more reasons an individual has in advance to believe that he can, will, or should develop a motive, the more educational attempts designed to develop that motive are likely to succeed.

2. The more an individual perceives that developing a motive is consistent with the demands of reality (and reason), the more educational attempts designed to develop that motive are likely to succeed.

3. The more thoroughly an individual develops and clearly conceptualizes the associative network defining the motive, the more likely he is to develop the motive.

4. The more an individual can link the newly developed network to related actions, the more the change in both thought and action is likely to occur and endure.

5. The more an individual can link the newly conceptualized association-action complex (or motive) to events in his everyday life, the more likely the motive complex is to influence his thoughts and actions in situations outside the training experience.

6. The more an individual can perceive and experience the newly conceptualized motive as an improvement in the self-image, the more the motive is likely to influence his future thoughts and actions.

7. The more an individual can perceive and experience the newly conceptualized motive as an improvement on prevailing cultural values, the more the motive is likely to influence his future thoughts and actions.

8. The more an individual commits himself to achieving concrete goals in life related to the newly formed motive, the more the motive is likely to influence his future thoughts and actions.

9. The more an individual keeps a record of his progress toward achieving goals to which he is committed, the more the newly formed motive is likely to influence his future thoughts and actions.

10. Changes in motives are more likely to occur in an interpersonal atmosphere in which the individual feels warmly but honestly supported and respected by others as a person capable of guiding and directing his own future behavior.

11. Changes in motives are more likely to occur the more the setting dramatizes the importance of self-study and lifts it out of the routine of everyday life.

While McClelland's propositions relate to motive development they are relevant to the whole process of education. They emphasize the meanings which the learner possesses not the meanings the instructor has for the course. McClelland emphasizes the necessity for the student to be able to see some relationship between course work and his goals for life. Propositions 8, 9, and 11 emphasize the necessity for complete student participation in the learning process. The student must be involved in assessing his own progress and setting his own objectives for the course. Evaluation, then, may be understood as helping the student to assess how well he has met the objective he set for his educational experience. Finally proposition 10 emphasizes the necessity of a warm, honest interpersonal atmosphere in which the student feels supported and capable of directing his own future.

Piersol (1970) examined three major appraisal systems in industry which shed further light upon the evaluation process. The first system was a ranking system in which each employee is evaluated in light of all other employees. In this system the supervisor ranks the performance of all persons working under him, discusses their performance with them in light of his rankings, and lets those on the bottom of the list go. This system destroys employee morale and inhibits interaction between employees.

The second appraisal system which has been utilized by industry is a trait oriented approach. In this system the

traits necessary for a given position in the system are analyzed and employees evaluated on the basis of these traits. Again morale goes down as a result of the employee evaluation. Research has indicated that a person can take three criticisms before he begins to block out the evaluation. If the criticisms are too many the employee begins looking for a new job.

The third appraisal system is one in which the employee sets his own objectives for a given period of time in consultation with his supervisor. These objectives reflect what the employee and supervisor believe is a reasonable set of accomplishments within that time period. The employee keeps a record of his own progress. At the end of the set period of time he reviews his accomplishments with his supervisor and sets new objectives. If some unexpected emergency should come up which restricts the employee's work capability, he may then renegotiate his objectives with his supervisor. In this system the employee sets his own objectives, has the support of his supervisor in meeting them, and is not caught in an arbitrary system which may lead to his dismissal given an emergency over which he has no control. With this appraisal system employee morale remains high, objectives are met, and as the individual fulfills his own objectives the company objectives are also met.

The above considerations have led me to experiment with different methods of classroom evaluations for students. The professor has various alternatives open to him by which he can reduce the importance of the final examination and turn it into some type of learning experience. He can reduce its total effect

the final grade, he can make the final exam optional, he can give a take-home examination, etc. These methods do not, however, take into consideration objectives which students may have for the course. They are still source (professor) oriented.

In one of my courses I have asked the students to set their own objectives. This is done during the first week of the course with the objectives being written down. Once the student sets his objectives for the course he is asked to choose some form of evaluation which allows him to meet this objective.

The student is allowed complete freedom to choose the method of evaluation which he feels will best fulfill his objectives. In order to faciliatate the decision I have usually listed some alternatives in the class syllabus. A student may choose to write a paper which focuses on a major survey of the literature. After the first term in which this was allowed it became evident that some communication was needed during the year before the paper was completed. Consequently in the past two terms, students choosing this alternative are asked to prepare a working bibliography during the first half of the term which is submitted for comment by the instructor. In many cases this is unnecessary since the student interacts with the instructor periodically during the term about the paper. In other cases, however, students are reluctant to interact or put off writing the paper until the very last moment. The precaution of a bibliography enables the instructor to guide the student away from introductory readers to more relevant literature and begin his work before the end of the term. The final paper is due

three weeks before the end of the term. (In Canada our term is seven months long). It is graded immediately and returned to the student who may, if he is not satisfied with the grade, rewrite the paper. So far only three students out of twenty have chosen to rewrite the paper. The others, by not rewriting, have communicated to me their satisfaction with the grade. One other student was dissatisfied with his grade but still chose not to rewrite the paper arguing that another professor said it was better than I said it was in my evaluation. A conversation with the other professor indicated that he had not seen the student recently but remembered the paper from another course. Such are the games that students play!

Other students choose to conduct research in some area of interest to them. These studies have been most fruitful with one of them already published in a Canadian journal and another being prepared for publication. Again some consultation between professor and student is necessary but in this case it is usually instigated by the students as they progress in their work.

The most popular alternative is what I have chosen to call the module system. If a student wants only a general overview of communication or social psychology they usually choose this alternative. A module is a two page paper answering some question posed by the professor. Questions are written which seek to have the student apply a theoretical concept to his life, work, education, or country. At the beginning of the term the students receive from me thirty-five module questions. They may choose any fifteen, answer them, and hand them in periodically during the term. These are graded immediately and handed back

to the student who, if he has received a grade below a "C", may rewrite and resubmit the module within three class periods after it is handed back. At the end of the term all modules may be rewritten and handed in as a take-home examination. Some students rewrite the modules indicating where their thinking has changed during the term. Other students hand in their original modules with my comments still upon them having made no changes whatsoever. If a student completes 15 modules with a "C" grade he is gauranteed a 60% ("C") grade in the course. At the end of the term all modules are re-evaluated and a final grade given on the basis of the average grade for the modules which will not be below 60%.

A small group of students each term choose to do extra reading and have periodic interviews with the instructor. Experience shows that most of these students work harder than other students in the course reading widely in the area. A few of them focus on areas which are of particular interest to them, e.g., non-verbal communication, communication in counselling, aspects of communication in criminology, communication and education. Students are often hesitant to have a personal interview with the instructor but soon find it a pleasant experience.

A few students still want a final examination. Out of the 120 students with which this approach has been attempted, five students have chosen an examination. Two of these students chose the alternative of writing their own examination questions and answering them. This approach to examinations does eliminate

the source bias in most exams. In this way the student is demonstrating not only his knowledge of the subject area but also those aspects of the subject which he considers to be most important. Only three students have opted for the traditional mid-term and final exam. They indicated that this is the system of evaluation with which they felt most comfortable.

Student comments upon class evaluation forms have been favorable towards this evaluation system. On a seven point scale (where 1 is very negative and 7 is very positive) the range of scores has been from 3 - 7 with an average rating of six. Written comments have indicated that students appreciate the freedom which this system allows them, feel they learn more, and feel the course has more relevance to them. One student indicated in a recent conversation that he found the module system made him read widely in relevant sources, forced him to make a synthesis of the material, and let him apply his knowledge to the field in which he is interested. One problem has been giving enough meaningful feedback on modules to the students. I am still working on this problem.

During the coming summer session I am considering breaking the course into short units and asking students to set objectives for one unit at a time. This should allow for even more interaction between student and instructor. Thus each section could be evaluated at its conclusion and necessary implementations of information made as soon as necessary.

Research by McKeachie and his associates (Ringwald, Mann, Rosenwein and McKeachie, 1971) indicates that students may be divided into eight different personality types. It seems

reasonable to suggest that no one form of evaluation will be adequate to allow each type of student to receive the most benefit from a course. Similarly no one method of interaction in the classroom will be adequate to enable the professor to communicate with each student. Some students are not ready for the type of evaluative approach I have suggested in this paper. Several students have indicated that they dropped a course in which this method was used by myself last year because they were not prepared to interact with the instructor on such a regular basis. This year they are in the class because now they feel the need for it. Most students are ready and capable of setting their own objectives and evaluating their progress in the classroom. Other students accept the method with some trepidation and find in the experience new insights into the meaning of education. A few students seek to misuse the system. Given any system of student evaluation such behaviors would still occur.

Within a system of education some type of evaluation process must occur. Evaluation can be one type of learning procedure. It goes on everytime a student and professor interact in the classroom, office, campus, etc. The more the student is able to fulfill his objectives for a course, evaluating his progress in meaningful interaction with his instructor, the more the student will learn and be able to utilize his knowledge later in life. The method of student evaluation presented in this paper is not meant to be the cure-all for the evaluation process but does seek to provide some base from which future efforts can grow.

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